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ABSTRACT

Equity in knowledge production and utilization calls for a bold approach with a system of planned intervention for educational change for the disadvantaged. Such an attempt should be based on a two-way flow of information model, and it might involve the training of persons indigenous to each group in the use of education products, and the reimplantation of these persons in their communities. They would then, through direct contacts with the dissemination network, become liaisons between the educational professionals and the disadvantaged groups of which they are members. The planning of such a system should involve the integration of research from the fields of communication, sociology, anthropology, and psychology on the information-seeking and educational behavior of the various groups of disadvantaged in the U.S. Planning should involve a mix of representatives of these groups in the design of research, the development of plans, and the implementation and evaluation of programs. The appointing of advisory boards would probably be the most appropriate method for involvement, and stress should be placed on the employment of persons from disadvantaged groups at all levels of the collection and dissemination system. Materials concerned with specific disadvantaged groups are included in the list of 28 references. (Author/RAA)

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EQUITY OF AUDIENCES IN EDUCATIONAL DISSEMINATION

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EQUITY OF AUDIENCES IN EDUCATIONAL DISSEMINATION

A. Introduction and Background

The face of American society has been rapidly changing in this century, and the rate of change has been particularly high since 1945. One element of this change has been the shift from having the great bulk of the population engaged in the production of goods to having a preponderance of the population engaged in the production and distribution of knowledge (Ellul, 1964; Machlup, 1962). It is reported that over 50 per cent of the population is involved in information and knowledge production and dissemination. Knowledge production and utilization (KPU) has become the central cost of the American economy (Drucker, 1969). At the same time, dramatic increases have been made in the production of goods, with an ever-decreasing percentage of the population involved in such production.

This dramatic shift in emphasis within the society has required drastic changes in the life styles and educational profiles of many segments of the nation's population. The balance of power in the society has shifted from those with control of the means of production to those with control over the production, collection, and dissemination of knowledge and information.

The growth in capacity for knowledge production and utilization has not occurred equally among all segments of the population, however. While KPU capacity has increased among the disadvantaged, among women, and among minorities, capacity has increased at a much faster rate among the advantaged segments of the population. Thus the gap between the information rich and the information poor has widened (Katzman, 1974), mainly because of the necessity to master the technological paraphernalia which is the handmaiden of increased capacity. Access to, and utilization of, knowledge and information is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the growth of influence, wealth, and power (Meier, 1962).

This lack of KPU capacity among the disadvantaged has many ramifications for the society. The effect in some cases is an imbalance in the distribution of disadvantaged groups in the professions. Some 43 per cent of all Black graduate students in doctoral programs were reported as being enrolled in the field of education (Institute for the Study of Educational Policy, 1976), and the number of Native Americans in the field of education ~~were~~ was reported as being three times greater than the combined totals for medicine, law, engineering, ancillary medicine, and business (Chavers, 1978). The percentage of Blacks entering the field of social work was reported to be several times greater than the percentage for the total population (Black Collegian, passim).

One of the main reasons for the low Black enrollment in the fields of science and engineering was reported to be discouraging information on the need of the nation for such professionals (Wilburn, 1974).

The lack of capacity for knowledge production and utilization among the disadvantaged has other ramifications for the society, including isolation from the mainstream of cultural and educational activity, lower levels of educational achievement, underutilization of social services, lack of input into the formation of public policy, underutilization of job training opportunities, underutilization of career development programs and opportunities, and underrepresentation in higher education and postgraduate programs.

B. Assumptions of the Present Educational Dissemination System

With the increased emphasis on education sparked by the launching of the Russian satellite Sputnik in 1957, the Federal government became more heavily and extensively involved with the status of education in the nation than before. The enactment of the Civil Rights, voting rights, and handicapped legislation and similar laws aimed at social justice brought the problems of minorities and the disadvantaged to national attention.

As a result, in the decade of the 1960's, the Federal involvement in education came to represent a major component of the annual Federal budget. While there had been informal dissemination of educational information and knowledge through professional associations, through state governments, and through other means, in the 1960's the Federal government became actively involved in the financing and support of collection and dissemination centers.

These centers were located at universities and at research institutes, and were designed by professional educators There was extensive involvement in the design of these centers by professional educational researchers, and some involvement by practitioners. As a result, the product which has received the greatest emphasis has been the collection and dissemination of educational knowledge, which is most often defined as the results of theoretical or applied research. Knowledge gained through scientific research is assumed to be the main "product" of the dissemination network (National Institute of Education, 1978).

Since the system was designed by professional educators and practitioners, it was designed largely for their use. The users are supposedly largely practitioners, and the producers of the products are educational researchers. The assumption appears to be that there is a one-way flow of information from the experts in education to the actual users of the information--the practitioners in the classroom, other researchers, and educational administrators--and through the practitioners to the pupils.

Other implicit assumptions are that the users are at the appropriate level of development, that there is a homogeneous population of users with the appropriate skills to access and use computerized data banks, information retrieval systems, and research reports. This assumption means that the actual users are limited to those with appropriate training and education in computer operations and other skills. Most sources of products and information rely heavily on technology for cheap and effective means of storing and retrieving large banks of data.

The present system also assumes that meaningful education largely takes place in the classroom, or at least that enough of the education and socialization of the mass of citizens occurs in the classroom that the classroom can make a difference in the overall impact education has on the development of the educated person. It also assumes that all segments of the population will eventually have access and make use of educational products, and that equity will be achieved.

C. Barriers to Access and Usage

Several years of operation of this system have apparently not, however, proved to make education more equitable across social groups, and in fact the implementation of the system may have widened the gap between the information rich and the information poor (Katzman, 1974). If the impact of the program is antithetical to the announced goal of providing equal educational opportunity to the disadvantaged and the advantaged, then there are obviously some barriers to the achievement of the goal of equal quality education.

Some of the barriers are structural; that is, they were created by the designers of the system or were existing previously. One of these barriers is the composition of school boards and the tenure and promotion committees of universities and colleges. Both these types of bodies tend to be made up of older male Caucasians who are members of the business and political community. The disadvantaged segments of the community are grossly underrepresented, and their needs and wants are seldom taken into account. This situation--the educational system being administered by male Caucasian businessmen--has a long history, going back to the businessmen in the 1830's who pushed for the legalization of compulsory education as a means of assimilating and socializing immigrants who were needed as

docile factory workers in New England, and levying taxes on the workers to make them pay for public education (Katz, 1972).

The controllers of education in the U. S. define the product which is to be considered for development by faculty members, and this product for higher education has been defined as the results of scientific research (Forbes, 1977). This concentration on scientific research has tended to denigrate the knowledge that is arrived at in other ways, or other ways of seeking truth. The folk wisdom developed through the ages, for instance, is given little importance as an educational product, except as the study of it adds to scientific theory. The effect is to produce a massive national effort at understanding the dynamics of education without producing the substance or curriculum that the teacher needs in the classroom. With the additional linkage between the universities and the public schools that the educational dissemination system has provided, the universities are setting the agenda for the methodology and techniques used in the classroom similar to the way that in an earlier day universities determined the curriculum of the secondary schools by developing the course requirements for admission to university study (Katz, 1972).

The disadvantaged segments of the society have limited access and make little use of the present system because there are few members of these segments involved in policy making, in agenda setting, and in gatekeeping in the educational system (Chavers, 1974, 1978; Forbes, 1977). The result is that the

educational system is not integrated into the community of interest of the disadvantaged; it is an element outside the community, in many cases existing in a colonial relationship to the disadvantaged elements of society. The disadvantaged are isolated from the educational system by the lack of active involvement with the system in some cases (social isolation), by geographic isolation in other cases, by linguistic barriers in other cases, and by cultural differences in still other cases (Chavers, 1978). Regardless of the reason for isolation, the effect is to limit greatly the involvement of the disadvantaged in even the basics of education, and practically to eliminate their use of the present products of the dissemination system. The products are understandable only by experts, and since the disadvantaged have few members who are trained to understand the products, the effect is to limit access to the whole segment which has few experts because most communication within such groups is in-group (Chavers, et al., 1971; Waddell and Watson, 1971; Bahr, et al., 1972; Dervin and Greenberg, 1972).

Outright discrimination against the disadvantaged, which is a more important factor than many in the nation want to admit, effectively limits their role in the educational system to one of being passive receivers of the benefits of formal education. The present dissemination network functions as a one-way system of communication from the advantaged to the

disadvantaged, from the rich to the poor, from the highly educated to the poorly educated.

The lack of knowledge of the disadvantaged by the system designers and controllers also prevents or limits access and usage. Too little is known about the communication and other types of behavior of the disadvantaged, with the result that knowledge of how these groups function and behave cannot be taken into account by the system designers. With some notable exceptions (e. g., Dervin and Greenberg, 1972; Greenberg and Dervin, 1972; Bahr, et al., 1972; Waddell and Watson, 1971; Childers and Post, 1975), knowledge of the behavior of the disadvantaged in the U. S. is sadly lacking.

Other types of barriers are behavioral, that is, they are created by the behavior, the culture, the goals, the needs, the expectations, and the desires of the disadvantaged. Very often the goals of the disadvantaged are very different from the goals of the advantaged. There is great concern by many disadvantaged groups about survival and jobs, with little effort expended or available to pursue education as a goal.

Many ethnic minority groups are characterized by cultural systems which stress styles of learning other than the scientific, such as emulation, learning by practice, observation, and others. Many such groups take pride in the preservation of their traditional cultural heritage. By excluding different learning styles from consideration, the controllers of education have in effect created a weak liaison with ethnic minorities.

There is little expectation by the members of many minority groups that knowledge can be advanced by dissecting, separating, analyzing, or fragmenting it, or by the study of individual elements taken out of the context of the whole (e. g., Castaneda, 1968, 1972a, 1972b; Neihardt, 1961). A major reason for the lack of formal education by the members of many disadvantaged groups is that the education offered in the schools is irrelevant to their cultural environment; their education is greatly influenced by their out-of-school experiences, and in many cases the out-of-school experiences account for the bulk of their actual education.

Many disadvantaged groups are characterized by a mentality of powerlessness. Their members are products of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1959; Forbes, 1969) which leads to low expectations, poor motivation, and other attitudes and actions detrimental to high achievement in education. Many are characterized by intensive use of interpersonal communication, and most of the persons with whom they communicate are members of their social, racial, economic, and cultural groups (Bahr, et al., 1972; Waddell and Watson, 1971; Chavers et al., 1971; Dervin and Greenberg, 1972).

Many disadvantaged persons make little use of the print media, and rely heavily on the broadcast media for information (Dervin and Greenberg, 1972; Chavers et al., 1971). Since the dissemination system is largely print oriented, access and usage by the disadvantaged is thereby limited.

D. Characteristics of the "Information Poor"

The usual definitions of the disadvantaged or the "information poor" include a variety of groups characterized by racial, economic, social, cultural, and other attributes. If the information poor are defined as those groups having limited access to educational information, and those which make limited use of the educational dissemination system, it is readily evident that such groups constitute a majority of the total U. S. population, as Chart 1 indicates.

But while such groups together constitute a majority, their share of the wealth, power, and influence in the society is disproportionately less than those groups with ready access and high usage of the system. The groups outlined on Chart 1 are characterized by poverty, with per capita income levels probably one half or less than the advantaged groups in the society.

The groups identified are heterogeneous both within and across groups. A few of them include persons representing a broad range of income, educational achievement, and social development, but most of the groups have few if any members who are high on these variables, and several groups have almost no members with high income, etc. In general, the groups are compressed at the low end of socio-economic and educational development, but they are heterogeneous by and

large on such variables as the topicality of education, socio-economic status, language dominance, educational achievement level, cultural/sociological/psychological predispositions, the adequacy of existing data bases, the ease of access to the educational information they need to function as equal participants, group histories, and the degree of involvement with the educational mainstream.

If the various groups were to be further differentiated by role as student, public, and professional (Paisley, 1978), as they in fact exist, the degree of heterogeneity would defy comprehension. That such variety exists is without question, and further points out the fragmentation characterizing the information poor. There is a lack of cohesive power bases among most disadvantaged groups, and few spokespersons to represent their interests to the education profession. Their poverty makes them relatively immobile, and the lack of out-group links makes them a series of relatively isolated, unconnected clusters. To use communication terminology, the information poor occupy a series of niches in the communication environment (Dervin and Greenberg, 1972), with relatively little overlap among the niches, with few links with each other, and with few links with the advantaged groups in the society.

E. Educational Information Needs of the "Information Poor"

The diversity of information poor groups and the heterogeneity existing within and across them point out the need for a diversified plan of action for meeting a multitude of needs. One possible approach is to list some of the content areas that the major clusters of the information poor are likely to need to achieve a greater degree of equity, and to attempt to ascertain which groups are likely to have need for and use each content area.

Chart 1 is an initial attempt using this approach. Some explanation of the chart is necessary. First, such an attempt is highly subjective; there are many variables to be taken into account in such an effort, among the most important being the range of educational achievement within a group, and the number of persons with specific skills to utilize a specific content area. Secondly, there is little data for comparison, so that definitive statements about numbers of persons are difficult to make. Thirdly, the chart assumes instant and universal access, not hampered by individual mobility, cost factors, isolation, and the like. Fourthly, the chart reveals a very rough approximation of a hierarchy of need, assuming that this initial attempt is not too unrealistic. Fifthly, roles within groups (Paisley, 1978) are not delineated; groups are listed in the aggregate. Sixthly, the chart is not inclusive or definitive, and is only intended for

Chart 1: Possible Content Areas of Educational Information for the Disadvantaged

	Educational Opportunities	Career Education	Program Design	Curriculum Materials	Culturally Relevant Standardized Tests	Baseline Data	Impact Data	Policy Studies	Theoretical Research
Minorities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rural	X	X	X						
Poor	X	X	X						
Women	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Immigrant	X	X			X				
Institutionalized	X			X		X			
Parents	X	X	X						
Students	X	X		X					
Handicapped	X	X	X	X					
Elderly	X					X	X		
Number of Groups with Information Needs In Content Area	10	8	6	5	2	4	3	2	2

illustration and comparison.

Using the chart as a point of departure, some generalities about educational information needs may be possible. If the chart is not too far off the mark, it reveals the most likely educational information needs of groups (Paisley, 1978). Some groups have more cohesive power bases than others, for instance, and devote substantial amounts of resources to policy making, while others devote little if any resources to policy making. If information is disseminated using a cost analysis basis for optimal or minimal usage, as is likely, the dissemination network will not likely have a free hand at attempting to meet the special information needs of a small number of persons from only one group, as an example; it is likely that a content area will be addressed if there is substantial demand for it.

Since the concentration of information needs is at the "lower" end of the "hierarchy," it is likely that the needs of many groups are in the areas of practical application, rather than in theoretical research (Childers and Post, 1975). The information needs of the information poor are little concerned with the results of theoretical research, and emphasis on research to the exclusion of other content areas will continue to limit usage by these groups. The probable emphasis should be on collection and dissemination of practical tools and products relevant to the history and culture of the various groups (Forbes, 1977).

F. Removing Barriers to Information Dissemination

A capsule summary of the main points of this paper up to this point would be as follows:

1. Education in the U. S. is controlled by those who are not disadvantaged;

2. There is a gap between the information rich and the information poor, and the technology-based, research-oriented educational dissemination network has widened the gap;

3. Access to information, and utilization of it, is necessary for equality in education;

4. The present dissemination system is characterized by a one-way flow of information from the producers and researchers to practitioners;

5. The designers of the system have inadequate knowledge of the disadvantaged to provide them with appropriate products and to stimulate usage;

6. The "information poor" are heterogeneous, fragmented, and have poor linkage outside their social groups;

7. The education products most needed by the information poor are those with practical application, rather than with theory and research.

The most important point to be made, perhaps, is that there are differences between those in the education profession and the disadvantaged, who are the least successful consumers of education. From the perspective of communication and sociology, there is inadequate linkage between the information rich and the information poor, there are differences in value systems and patterns of behavior, and there is a one-way flow of communication and information which has proven inadequate for the goal of providing equal educational opportunity.

A comparison with another education program in the U. S. will illustrate the point. With the passage of the Bilingual Education Act in the late 1960's, the U. S. made a commitment to provide initial education to non-English speakers in their first language as a means of achieving better education. This was implemented through Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Within a few years it became evident to the government officials operating the program that there were not enough bilingual teachers available to staff the classrooms. In the second stage, the program was modified to provide for the training of bilingual teachers. Then it was discovered that there were not enough university faculty members knowledgeable in bilingual education to train the teachers, and in the third stage, provision was made for the training of faculty members for teacher training programs. Perhaps the educational dissemination network is now at a comparable second stage, and a way can be devised to train persons who would be analogous in the dissemination effort to teachers in education practice.

The problems with the present system are formidable, and are not unique to the dissemination system; they are also encountered in the educational system in general. Fortunately, there are three examples of attempts to breach similar gaps between the "haves" and the "have-nots" which have worked--the barefoot doctors in China, the county agent/home demonstration agent

network in U. S. rural development, and the national emphasis on universal literacy in Cuban education.

Equity in knowledge production and utilization calls for a bold approach with a system of planned intervention for educational change for the disadvantaged. Such an attempt might involve the training of persons indigenous to each group in the use of education products, and the reimplantation of these persons in their communities. They would then in effect, through direct contacts with the dissemination network, become liaisons between the educational professionals and the disadvantaged groups of which they are members.

The planning of such a system should involve the integration of research from the fields of communication, sociology, anthropology, and psychology on the information-seeking and educational behavior of the various groups of disadvantaged in the U. S. Planning should involve a mix of representatives of the various disadvantaged groups in the design of research, the development of plans, and the implementation and evaluation of programs. The appointing of advisory boards would probably be the most appropriate method for involvement, and stress should be placed on the employment of persons from disadvantaged groups as employees in the collection and dissemination system, at all levels.

The attempt in designing interventionist strategies should be based on a two-way flow of information model. Some ways to

approach the two-way model, in addition to the involvement of the disadvantaged in planning and evaluation, would be to develop field testing procedures for each phase of operation in order to provide immediate feedback, to train researchers and practitioners from the disadvantaged groups, and to design, collect, and disseminate educational products appropriate to the level of development of various groups.

The most important point to be made, however, is not that interventionist strategies or any other particular technique will work best; proper design and testing will determine this. Whatever approach is made will have to take into account the lack of communication and linkage between the advantaged elements of the society and the disadvantaged elements. The fate of the disadvantaged is partly determined by the actions of the advantaged, and is partly determined by the attitudes and actions of the disadvantaged groups themselves. Self-determination has not been thought to be important by most professional educators and controllers of education up to now. For educational improvement for the disadvantaged to occur, however, self-determination will have to be used to build upon the experiences of disadvantaged groups, rather than being thought of as an obstacle to the achievement of what persons other than the disadvantaged think should be the proper education.

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